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ABSTRACT

Toman's theory of the relation of birth-order compatibility and interpersonal relations was extended to dyads (pairs) with members of the same sex. It was predicted that interpersonal compatibility between members of same-sex dyads (50 female, 27 male pairs of Vassar College roommates) would be positively correlated with birth-order compatibility (no rank or sex conflict) of the dyad members. That is, it was expected that the oldest sister of sisters would get along better with the younger sister of sisters (no rank or sex conflict) than with the older sister of brothers (rank and sex conflict). All pairs indicated (a) their familial birth-order relations, and (b) the degree of conflict experienced with their roommates, rated on a 5-point scale. Results supported the prediction. A second study (31 female, 31 male pairs) replicated these results, and indicated that this extension holds for same-sex dyads across both sexes. A discussion of the place of Toman's theory in birth-order research is offered. (Author/PFS)

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Same-Sex Dyads and Toman's Theory of Birth-Order Compatibility

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Same-Sex Dyads and Toman's Theory

of Birth-Order Compatibility

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Toman's theory of the relation of birth-order compatibility and interpersonal relations was extended to dyads with members of the same sex. It was predicted that interpersonal compatibility between members of same-sex dyads (77 pairs of college roommates) would be positively correlated with birth-order compatibility of the dyad members. Results supported the prediction. A second study replicated these results, and indicated that this extension holds for same-sex dyads across both sexes. A discussion of the place of Toman's theory in birth-order research is offered.

Same-Sex Dyads and Toman's Theory of Birth-Order Compatibility

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Examination of research on birth-order effects reveals an area of increasing methodological complexity. While early research supported some birth-order effects (Schachter, 1959), a recent review of the literature concludes that many such effects are "not here, not now" (Schooler, 1972). Schooler states that the interactions with density of sibship and sex of siblings greatly increase the complexity of birth-order analyses. He recommends that future analyses involve an examination of the effects of differences in the sex and spacing of siblings adjacent to the subject of different ranks.

The research of Toman (1961, 1962) relating birth-order compatibility to interpersonal relations has been largely ignored by American researchers. Using primarily European samples, Toman conducted research long ago which focused upon the variables cited by Schooler, i.e., sex and sibling spacing adjacent to the subjects of interest. Toman (1961) has offered evidence that opposite-sex relationships exhibit interpersonal stability to the degree that dyad members are compatible for birth order. Birth-order compatibility means the absence of (a) rank conflict, e.g., older brother of sisters marrying an older sister of brother, and (b) sex conflict, e.g., older brother of brother marrying a younger sister of sisters. Interpersonal compatibility is most often operationalized using couples married for ten or more years (compatible) and divorced couples (incompatible).

One of the many possible assumptions emerging from this research is that same-sex friendships should tend to duplicate the friends' sibling relationships in cases of monosexual sibling configurations--an obscure way of saying that women who grow up with sisters as sibs should get along better with other women who grow up with sisters than with women who growup with brothers. Also, such same-sex friendships should not form in the first place in those instances of heterosexual sibling configurations on both sides or in case of identical sibling positions (Toman, 1961).

Study 1

In light of the implications of this research for interpersonal relations, and because of the predictive claims made for Toman's theory of birth-order compatibility, the present research sought to extend Toman's theory to interpersonal compatibility among same-sex dyads. Toman's theory should predict that those dyads exhibiting least interpersonal conflict would be those in which members' birth orders reflected sibling relations of the same sex and were appropriately matched for rank. The oldest sister of sisters, for instance, would be expected to get along better with the younger sister of sisters (no rank or sex conflict) than with the older sister of brothers (rank and sex conflict).

Method

Subjects and Procedure

Fifty pairs of female and 27 pairs of male dormitory roommates at Vassar College were selected for study. Subject pairs were selected from several campus dormitories. All subjects were in the freshman class,

since many upperclassmen do not live in the dormitory situation. Each pair, of course, shared the same quarters. The average age of the total sample was 18 years.

Pairs indicated (a) their familial birth-order relations and (b) the degree of interpersonal conflict experienced with their roommates. Interpersonal conflict was defined as the reported degree of controversy, disagreement, and argumentativeness among roommates; it was operationalized on a 5-point scale, with 1 representing "no conflict" and 5 representing "much conflict." Each pair was than classified as (a) compatible or incompatible for birth order (presence of both rank and sex conflict), and (b) reporting high interpersonal conflict (scale value of 3 or higher) or low interpersonal conflict (below 3.0).

Results

Of the total sample, 12 pairs reported high interpersonal conflict and exhibited conflicting birth orders; 20 pairs, low interpersonal conflict, conflicting birth orders; six pairs, high interpersonal conflict, no birth-order conflict; 39 pairs, low interpersonal conflict and no birth-order conflict. A test for independece yielded significant results ($X^2 = 4.82$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). The findings thus offer some support of the applicability of Toman's theory to dyadic relations with members of the same sex.

Study 2

While some support for the theoretical extension was revealed, a replication was attempted, with the additional intent of determining if the birth-order/interpersonal compatibility relationship would hold for same-sex dyads across both sexes.

Method

Subjects and Procedure

A sample of Vassar College dormitory roommates (31 pairs of females, 31 pairs of males) was selected from a new freshman class. The average age for the total sample was 18 years, 4 months. Following the same procedure outlined above, pairs indicated their familial birth order and the degree of conflict experienced with their roommates, as in the previous study. As in the first study, each pair was classified as compatible or incompatible for birth order (presence of rank and sex conflict) and as reported high or low interpersonal conflict.

Results

Eighteen of the original 62 pairs exhibited partial complimentarity of birth order (rank or sex conflict only). Analyses of the remaining fully incompatible (rank and sex conflict) pairs were performed. Of the pairs of females, two pairs exhibited low interpersonal conflict and conflicting birth orders; one pair, high interpersonal conflict, no birth-order conflict; 17 pairs, low interpersonal conflict, no birth-order conflict; and four pairs, high interpersonal conflict, birth-order conflict. A test for independence yielded significant results ($X^2 = 6.82$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Data for the male pairs were distributed as follows: no pairs experienced low interpersonal conflict and birth-order conflict; one pair, high interpersonal conflict, no birth-order conflict; 13 pairs, low interpersonal conflict, no birth-order conflict; six pairs, high interpersonal conflict, birth-order conflict. Results for males were also significant ($X^2 = 12.10$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$).

General Discussion

These studies provide some evidence consistent with Toman's theorizing, and indicate that the birth-order/interpersonal compatibility

relationship may indeed apply to same-sex dyads of both males and females. The results are, of course, correlational, and thus do not provide evidence of causation, i.e., that birth-order configurations determine the degree of compatibility existent in adult same-sex dyads. Also, the results do not reveal possible consistent mediating effects of a number of variables thus far unexamined.

It is puzzling why Toman's theory of birth-order compatibility has not aroused more attention from American researchers. Evidence seems to indicate that the theory does account for some of the variance existing in human social relations. There are a number of reasons for this Western neglect. Toman's research has been published largely within the literature on marriage and family for European populations. His theory has, at times, been presented as a "game" (Toman, 1961), and also has advanced rather extravagant claims as prediction. (Toman has claimed that birth-order configurations may account for as much as 20% of the variance in individual differences in social relations). Toman has also presented his theorizing in the form of "interpersonal typologies" in the popular press (Toman, 1970). Finally, the predictions derived from the theory seem almost "common sensical.' And this is the surprising feature--that such an apparent relationship, supported by evidence consistent with the theory, has been overlocked for so long.

While Toman's theory focuses upon the kind of complexities recommended by Schooler, further research on the intricacies and interactions with sibling configurations, using more sophisticated assessments of interpersonal compatibility, should now proceed.

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Footnote

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